6. OCCURRENCE OF CHESTNUTHEADED BEE-EATER (*MEROPS LESCHENAULTI*) IN BOMBAY

On 30th August 1978, while bird watching in Borivli National Park, we saw two Chestnutheaded bee-eaters (*Merops leschenaulti*) on overhead electric wire near the Bacon Factory *nalla*, on the way to Lion Safari Park. There were also a few Common green bee-eaters (*M. orientalis*) on the same wire but at *c* 10 metres from the Chestnutheaded bee-eaters which facilitated comparison. The Chestnutheaded bee-eaters were slightly larger, with a prominent bright yellow patch covering the chin and throat and a chocolate coloured cap. We did not see the back of the specimens. The absence of long pin feathers of the tail indicated beyond doubt the identity of the birds.

According to Ripley (1961, SYNOPSIS) the species occurs "from the plains to 5000 feet, in well wooded country" and in the stretch along the west coast of India it has not been recorded north of Belgaum. Sálim Ali and Ripley (1970; HANDBOOK 4, p. 100) state that the species occurs "Also in the Western Ghats complex, from about Goa southward (including western Mysore, Western Tamil Nadu and Kerala) and Ceylon". Humayum Abdulali (1971; CHECKLIST OF THE BIRDS OF MAHARASHTRA) has marked the species as being occasionally sighted "either in Ratnagiri and/or Mahabaleshwar" and its migratory or residential status as undecided. However, after verifying his notes H.A. (personal communication) has indicated (on the basis of Hume's foot note in *Stray Feathers*, Vol: IX, p. 49) that the only records of Chestnutheaded bee-eater from Maharashtra are from Vengurla (appreciably south of Ratnagiri) where a Capt. Bingham found it common in January.

The present sight record of the Chestnutheaded bee-eater in Borivli National Park, Bombay is an extension of its known distribution range.

CURATOR (WILDLIFE),
BORIVLI NATIONAL PARK,
BOMBAY-400 066.

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7. BEEHIVE PREDATION BY WASPS (GENUS *VESPA*) AND ITS POSSIBLE BENEFIT TO HONEYGUIDES (INDICATORIDAE) IN BHUTAN

Cerophagy or wax eating habit of many species of Honeyguides in Africa and Asia has been known for quite some time. Some species of honeyguides in Africa are known to have developed symbiotic relations with man and other animals to secure beeswax from hives inaccessible to the birds themselves. Several other species of honeyguides are also

known to take beeswax along with other insects though how they obtain the wax is not clear. Since bees would actively defend their nests the birds perhaps get their wax either from the combs abandoned by the bees or on the leavings of other bee hive predators.

Iwata (1976 EVOLUTION OF THE INSTINCT: COMPARATIVE ETHOLOGY OF HYMENOPTERA) mentions the behaviour of the Genus *Vespa* and states that several species of this family attack the nests of honey bees and other wasps, indiscriminately killing their larvae, pupae and adults. Friedmann (1955 The Honeyguides. *United States National Museum Bulletin* 208: 292 pp.; 1972 The Asian Honeyguides. *J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc. 71*: 426-432.) has discussed the various aspects of beeswax eating and guiding habits of the Indicatoridae. While information about Asian honeyguides is meagre, all the data given in Friedmann's papers relate to cases where cerophagy by honeyguides in Africa is from inaccessible bee hives after their being opened up by other predators. Many possible bee hive predators are discussed but there is no mention of predatory insects. Information is also not available whether honeyguides feed on exposed (abandoned bee combs) or of the birds' occurrence at such sites in any numbers.

In May-June one of us (SAH), and again in October-November 1977 we visited central Bhutan to study the ecology of the Orange-rumped Honeyguide (*Indicator xanthonotus*), sponsored by the Society's Sálim Ali Nature Conservation Fund. Most of our studies were carried out around clusters of hives of the giant Rock bee (*Apis dorsata*) situated at 'Honey Rock' *c* 5500 ft in Central Bhutan.

During the course of our study in October-November, we noticed several large wasps (specimens later identified at the British Museum as *Vespa mandarina magnifica*) attacking active bee hives. Four or five wasps would attack a nest while the bees would actively defend the same. Occasionally there would be fierce 'dog fights' between the bees and the wasps resulting in the death of a few wasps and many bees. On 24 October we observed a great deal of activity around a particular bee nest. A large number of wasps had concenterated their attack on this nest while the bees, now seriously disturbed, were swarming all over the rock face trying to ward off the attackers. The battle went on for quite 10 minutes with the bees obviously having the worse of exchanges. Slowly the yellowish white wax structure of the upper basal part of the bee comb became visible as the bees started vacating the nest. The wasps now concentrated their attack on this portion of the comb with greater vigour. After a few minutes the bees vacated the entire comb and continued to hover near the rock face. The assembly slowly drifted away from the rock and disappeared *en masse* down the ravine. The wasps then settled on the exposed bee comb and started digging out larvae and pupae. While the above activities were in progress the honeyguides had kept away from the rock face. Once the comb was exposed several honeyguides arrived on the scene and perched at various places on the cliff face. A few birds tried to approach the exposed comb but were chased away by the wasps. After the wasps had finished feeding and had vacated the comb several honeyguides settled on it and commenced feeding on the wax.

Our studies in Bhutan reveal that Orange-rumped Honeyguides feed on old bee combs occurring among active exposed hives of *Apis dorsata* on rock cliffs. They also feed on scraps of pure wax adhering to cliff faces or on old combs fallen below the cliff. The birds generally congregate near traditional bee nesting sites. E. J. Cronin and P. J. Sherman (1976 A resource based mating system—Or-

angerumped Honeyguide. THE LIVING BIRD) have also reported on the Wax eating habits of this species in eastern Nepal.

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8. A NOTE ON THE PREDATION OF JUNGLE MYNA (*ACRIDOTHERES FUSCUS* WAGLER) ON FIELD MOUSE

On the evening of 2nd June 1978 I was watching for wild dogs and at 1746 hrs. a jungle myna alighted on the ground 30 metres away from me and caught an ashy white animal. When I carfeully observed it with binoculars I found it to be a field mouse, probably a young. The myna had caught the head end of the mouse and battered it repeatedly. Occasionally the bird screeched as if it had got into a trouble by tackling an unusual prey. By 1749 hrs. the mouse appeared to be dead and the myna, after having placed it on the ground and (battering) shaking it throughly, flew off and dropped it in to its nest hole on an *Albizzia odoratissima* tree at a height of 9-10 metres. Later when I moved from the original place I could see the gaping mouths of two nestlings but I was uncertain whether the mouse was swallowed by a chick. Once I saw a crow-pheasant hopping along a water edge trying to catch frogs, which I thought was to be expected. But the ability of a myna to kill a mouse was something I never expected.

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(Baby mice have been recorded as an occasional food item in the INDIAN HANDBOOK, 5: 179—EDS).

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9. THE NESTING OF TICKELL'S FLYCATCHER (*MUSCICAPA TICKELLIAE*) IN BOMBAY

Many years ago Betham took eggs of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Muscicapa tickelliae*) at Poona in July/August and Davidson on Kondabhari Ghat, near Dhulia, in July. In NIDIFICATION (2 : 202), Stuart Baker presumably with additional data, said it bred at Poona and the Western Ghats from May/June to August.